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EDUCATING THE CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED, A MATURING APPROACH.

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THIS REPORT BRIEFLY REVIEWS TRENDS IN 20TH-CENTURY RESEARCH ON EDUCATING DISADVANTAGED AND MINORITY GROUP PUPILS. MANY STUDIES WRITTEN IN THE 1920'S AND 1930'S INDICATED THAT NEGROES WERE LESS INTELLIGENT THAN CAUCASIANS, AND THUS TEACHERS DEMANDED LITTLE OF THEIR MINORITY GROUP PUPILS. SINCE THAT TIME RESEARCH STUDIES HAVE EMPHASIZED THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENT AND EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES UPON THE CHILD'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT. SOME EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE DISADVANTAGED, AMONG WHICH ARE THE EARLY TRAINING PROJECT IN MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE, THE BANNEKER SCHOOL PROJECT IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, AND THE HIGHER HORIZONS PROGRAM IN NEW YORK CITY. AFFECTING PUPILS IN PRESCHOOL THROUGH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADES, THESE PROGRAMS REFLECT THE CURRENT BELIEF THAT PUPIL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE MAY BE ENHANCED THROUGH EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION. (LB)

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EDUCATING THE CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED: A MATURING APPROACH

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The teamwork of the psychometrist and the educational researcher in the first half of the twentieth century has produced many positive contributions to the formal educative efforts of the nation. There have been, on the other hand, some contributions that have been of doubtful value.

Through the early decades of this century volumes of research reports have been compiled on the comparative intellectual statuses of Caucasians and Negroes, Caucasians and Indians, and Caucasians and Mexican-Americans. The Puerto Ricans have also had their share of mental testing. Though some researchers are still deeply concerned with the continuance of experimental studies of comparative differences in intelligence between Caucasians and Mexican-Americans, the zenith, or if one prefers, the nadir, was reached in 1958 when a professor at Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia published her book on the intelligence of the Negro.[1] Her research was extensive and refined. The Negro race was even broken down into splinter groups: the light brown, brown, dark brown; black; thickness of lips; width of nose; ear height; interpupillary span; cephalic index. Her research was scholarly and the conclusion inevitable. All test evidence pointed toward the fact that Negroes make lower IQ scores than do Caucasians. Her further conclusion that the obtained differences are a reflection of innate differences between the races seems to be subject to controversy.

Interestingly enough, when such comparative studies were numerically at their peak during the 1920's and 1930's discussion was muted with reference to the drawing of comparisons between the mental test performance of Caucasians from the poorer southern states and Caucasians from the more wealthier northern states. Too, mental test performance of middle class pupils was seldom contrasted with pupils from the same race in slum ghettos. Further findings during the 1940's and 1950's have been little publicized when they dealt with the effects of preschool training or early placement of low-income family children in foster homes of a middle-class nature.

The evidence seems to be in now and it is possible that the furtherance of the educative effort is not dependent upon more comparative studies of racial and ethnic groups. In fact, by the end of the 1920's the evidence had been

gathered. Mental testing with the Army Alpha and the Army Beta had supplied findings which were not to be overturned by the abundance of studies which followed World War I.

Probably some of the more unfortunate results of these studies has been the development of myths concerning racial and ethnic intelligence. Negroes, Mexican-Americans, and Indians began to believe they really were mentally inferior. Those who were at the bottom of the social-class structure in America were presumed to reside there primarily because they lacked the mental capacity to rise.

Most damaging of all, teachers came to expect very little of students who came from these racial and ethnic groups. This, then, began the vicious circle. The teachers expected little; pupils sensed that they were not considered intellectually capable and that the teachers expected little from them; the pupils through their academic performance justified the expectations of their teachers.

Within recent years American education has begun to mature in its approach to the education of children from low-income families. IQ's have been de-emphasized. The more mature and positive approach that is now coming into vogue deals with the manipulation of the student's environment in an attempt to provide him with a more suitable educational program. The intense interest in programs for the culturally handicapped that is currently being developed throughout America typifies the new and more fruitful approach to the education of lower-class children. Significantly, this class is peopled primarily by those who made up the groups earlier found to be deficient in intelligence test performance.

The Inglis Lecture at Harvard University of Allison Davis in 1948 was one of several factors instrumental in turning American educators' attention to the crippling affects of an underprivileged environment. In this lecture, subsequently published as Social-Class Influences on Learning, Davis pointed out the affective nature of the slum culture which we now know is so inimical to the school's purposes.

> Now a child cannot learn his mores, social drives, and values -- his basic culture -- from books. He can learn a particular culture and a particular moral system only from those people who know this behavior, and who exhibit it in frequent relationships with the learner. If a child associates intimately with no one but slum adults and children, he will learn only slum culture. Thus the pivotal meaning of social classes to the student of behavior is that they limit and pattern the learning environment; they structure the social "maze" in which the child learns his habits and meanings.[2]

In 1949 Hebb's book on the organization of behavior was published. It was his belief that learning is influenced by earlier learning. Perception is affected by past experiences. What is learned is in terms of what is perceived. What is seen and remembered represents the results of comparing the present with the past. The experiences of childhood affect permanently one's attitudes, interests, and abilities, and the level of problem solving at maturity may be influenced permanently by the child's early experiences. Logically following from this, the richer the child's environment, all other things being equal, the richer the sensory input as a result of environmental exposure. The richer the input, then, the richer will be the individual's thought life or mental imageries.

The culturally handicapped, operating within a stultifying environment meager in high order mentally stimulating materials, have a lower sensory input than those individuals who are from middle-class circumstances. Further, since the facts and circumstances of middle-class life form the bases of our school's curriculum the culturally disadvantaged are handicapped in our schools. To improve their performance the schools must provide them with some of those experiences which they lack.

The findings of Piaget, as he concerns himself with how intelligence originates in children, confirm Hebb's conclusions.[4] Piaget believes that there exists a sensorimotor, or practical, intelligence whose functioning extends that of the mechanisms of lower intellectual functioning, e.g., circular reactions, reflexes, and still more profoundly, the morphogenetic activity of the organism itself. Intellectual progress is dependent upon pressure from the external environment whose characteristics impress themselves little by little on the child's mind. For its continuous development a continuous interaction with the environment is needed. The early sensorimotor organizations of the infant are modified and transformed as the child continually learns to cope with his environment and internalizes these learning, together with generalizations, to new situations. Piaget conceives of these changes as being continual and progressive, occurring in a fixed order, from the sensorimotor period of infancy through the stages of adolescence.

Susan Gray sees two broad areas in the classroom wherein children from culturally handicapping homes are penalized: attitude toward achievement, and aptitude for achievement.[5] According to her a culturally deprived environment produces children with less aptitude for school achievement. Hence the home and

the early childhood environment in general become contributing factors in the delimitation of the individual's later academic development.

Persistence is a necessary concomitant to scholarship. Gray believes that, though specific to a given task, persistence toward a goal may be influenced by the family's set of values. If the goals are academic, then persistence becomes an important corollary to academic achievement. Persistence is a necessity if the school child is to successfully mount the inclined plane of culture. Parental urging becomes a necessary ingredient. A family background which does not place a high value on specific academic achievement can retard the forward momentum of the climber, and eventuate into the development of a poor achiever and a subsequent dropout.

Gray agrees with Davis that the culture of the slum does not foster attitudes favorable to school achievement in its youths. Winterbottom and Rosen, through their studies, have concluded that social-class position and the interaction of parents and child during the early and formative years subsequently affect the drive to succeed which is so essential to successful school performance.[6,7,8] There are certain characteristics which set the lower-class child apart from his middle-class counterpart. He lacks an internalized standard of excellence; he lacks persistence and achievement motivation; he is unable to postpone immediate gratification; and by the time of school entry has a set of attitudes which mitigate against successful performance in the typical American school.

Hunt, too, believes that the development of intelligence is dependent upon a rich and variegated input of perceptual experiences during the early development period. The congruency of stimulation to experiential background is important. Hence, classroom tasks too far removed from the student's experiential world cause withdrawal. Those mildly different are challenging. Those which are the same as one's background and involve no novelty are boring.[9, 10]

The most severe effects of stimulus deprivation occur in the early months and years of the individual's life. In addition, the duration of the deprivation will determine to some extent the severity of the deficit. The child who is not restricted continues to seek sensory input, and that input which is mildly but not severely incongruous will motivate the child to seek further stimulation. The more he sees, the more he wants to see. The more he hears, the more he wants to hear. Thus motivation becomes an important aspect of intellectual development. The culturally disadvantaged child is not only deprived of sufficient

input but of the motivation to seek the potential stimuli available in his environment. Hence, ameliorative attempts should provide early intervention, intervention at the point when the resources of the impoverished environment and their availability to the child are being exhausted.

This concept of the "match" is particularly important in planning educational programs for such children. Program planners must be careful not to err in the direction of developing too great an incongruity between input and the child's previous experiential world.

According to Hunt, beliefs in fixed intelligence and predetermined development have persisted for over one-half of a century.[11] They have provided theory and bases for research investigations. They have provided a conceptual framework for the measurement of man's intellect and have accounted for the developmental characteristics of abilities. Such abilities, residing in a matrix of intelligence, were considered almost predetermined by genotypical factors, immutable and fixed at conception. Recent evidence has forced man to consider the role of the central processes in learning, and to recognize the crucial importance of life experiences in the development of the central processes.

> The concepts of fixed intelligence and of predetermined development have both rested on the assumption that unlearned behavior patterns and various capacities are somehow derived directly, automatically, and more or less completely from somatic cerebral structures and their functional properties. There is no question that somatic and cerebral structures with their functional properties are important, but it has become more and more clear that experience is required for the development of these behavior patterns and capacities, and especially for the development of those central organizations for the processing of information that are required to solve problems.[12]

Three School Programs Developed For The Culturally Handicapped

The Early Training Project[13, 14] Murfreesboro, Tennessee

The Murfreesboro, Tennessee public schools, working with the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, secured a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health and developed a preschool training program for forty Negro children from the slums whose average chronological age at the beginning of the project was forty-five months.

The goals of the program were to increase aptitude for academic achievement and develop desirable attitudes toward academic achievement. In the area of aptitude the experimenters concentrated on perceptual and language development and concept formation. The study was designed to develop desirable parental attitudes toward the child's later achievement in elementary school and develop within the child achievement motivation persistence, ability to delay gratification, interest in school-type activities, and identification with achieving role models.

The study was well designed. Experimental and control groups were randomly selected and the experimental variables provided for only the E subjects. During the summers, prior to formal entry into the public schools, the students were brought into one of the schools for ten-week sessions with one teacher to every four or five students. Activities were provided that were within the capabilities of the students. During the regular school year a home visitor went to each child's house once a week for forty-five minutes and continued some of the activities begun during the summer.

The IQ scores of the experimental students increased significantly. Since, at the last reporting of the project's progress, none of the children had reached the age for enrolling in the first grade, it is unknown whether such efforts will pay off in a higher quality student performance in the regular school program.

The Baltimore public schools reportedly are also working with preschool training programs for culturally handicapped children.

The Banneker School Project[15, 16, 17, 18, 19]
St. Louis, Missouri

Easily, one of the more dramatic and effective approaches to the education of slum area children that is reported anywhere in the literature today is that of the Banneker School District in St. Louis, Missouri. Under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Samuel Shepard, Jr., this very successful program has cost little in money, much in sincere dedication to the discharge of their responsibilities on the part of school administrators, teachers, pupils, and parents, and has brought maximum results in terms of elevated academic pupil performance without lowering achievement standards in the least. No grant of money was needed from any foundation or governmental agency. All that was needed was the cooperative effort and sincere dedication of parent, pupil, school, and community to the discharge of the basic responsibilities that were peculiar to each.

The Banneker District is most accurately described as a "slum" area, encompassing chiefly individuals at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, and has the city's highest crime rate, disease rate, greatest poverty, and the usual other attendant circumstances. The twenty-three elementary schools are populated by about 16,000 children, 500 teachers, and 20 principals. About 90 per cent of the teachers are Negroes. About 95 per cent of the students are Negroes. The St. Louis system follows the 8-4 plan.

The district's project has been appropriately called "Operation Motivation." In the project all forces were utilized to conquer the problem of underachievement. Pupils, teachers, parents, and the community joined hands and worked together for the common goal. Students ranged from four months to four years in subject area retardation. Teachers were given in-service training to assist them to raise their levels of expectation, understand their students, and increase their teaching skills. The pupils were informed as to just where they stood in reference to grade norms in each subject matter area, and were given plenty of homework to do to enable them to begin closing the gap. The parents were given a "Parents Pledge of Cooperation" to tack up in their kitchen and were brought in large numbers into the PTA's. Teachers visited with the parents in their homes, at the same time enlisting the support of the home in the campaign to elevate pupil performance. The resources of the community were tapped and frequent excursions were made outside of their ghettos by the students to points of interest in the city. These trips later were used as rallying points for class discussion and homework.

The latest release from the assistant superintendent's office offers the following comments:

> Our efforts have had some success. For the first time in our district, pupils leaving the 8th grade and entering the high school have reached or exceeded the national norms in the important tool subjects, reading and language, and have just missed the national norm in arithmetic by one month. We are encouraged by these gains and are determined not only to continue our four-pronged (parents, teachers, pupils, and community) program, but to expand our efforts.

<u>The Higher Horizons Program</u>[20, 21, 22, 23]
<u>New York City</u>

The Higher Horizons approach is based upon the premise that desirable changes in an individual child can be effected best by direct influence on the child himself, upon the teacher, and upon the parent. It was hypothesized that, to raise motivational and achievement levels, the child must first believe this is possible, must first raise his self-esteem. The teacher, the key to the program, must also believe in the student, be enthused, be willing to look for and have the capabilities of finding the untapped reservoir of talent which may exist in her slum area charges. The parents, too, must be involved. Though they want for their children more education, a better job, and a better life, the schools must convince them of the relatedness of their objectives.

The action aspect of the program falls into nine categories: inspirational, guidance, teacher training, curriculum enrichment, curriculum adaptation, remedial, cultural, parent and community education, and record keeping and evaluation.

The Higher Horizons approach is many faceted. Students are inspired to believe in themselves. Teachers are indoctrinated in new motivational methods and new teaching techniques. Parents, when informed of the school's purposes, join hands with the teachers in their efforts to raise their children's achievement level. The program has improved the student's self-image by bringing in success figures from the same racial and ethnic background. More teachers have been hired with specialized training. Remedial teaching has been offered where necessary. Increased counseling service has been made available, class size cut, and the number of trips outside of the child's neighborhood increased.

It has been observed that teacher, pupil, and parental pride rise in proportion to the success and enthusiasm engendered by the progressive unfoldment of the project. The greatest enemy to the success of the teachers' efforts has been "as well as can be expected." Teachers have been trained to raise their expectation levels by means of meetings, bulletins, workshops, reading, and individual and group conferences.

During the 1963-64 school year the program is to be evaluated. The evaluation is to be by an agency other than the public school.

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